

Ink and Blood

Dueling as an Occupational Hazard in Southern Journalism

Newspaper editors figured prominently in the savage and romantic history of dueling and related forms of violence in the nineteenth-century South. The phenomenon has left a colorful record that touches even Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain. But it has long been dismissed as irrelevant to media history, or forgotten entirely. This article reexamines the prevalence of gun violence, particularly the code duello that surrounded the practice of journalism in the South during the nineteenth century. To the Southern gentry of the period, dueling was distinct from, and possibly a restraint on, more general violence. In either case, the violence was frequently directed against, or initiated by, newspaper editors. Here, three editors are examined to trace the gradual decline of dueling as a preoccupation of Southern culture. These are O. Jennings Wise, antebellum editor of the Richmond Enquirer; William G. Brownlow, editor of a series of Whig newspapers in East Tennessee between 1839 and 1877; and Francis W. Dawson, a founding editor of the Charleston News & Courier. This article finds that the disappearance of dueling was, rather, a gradual transformation that left a legacy of violence and, also, a legacy of courage as an editorial virtue.

In 1866, the *New York Times* carried a brief front-page account of a bizarre shootout in Richmond, Virginia, involving three prominent newspaper editors. The armed journalists, one from the *Richmond Examiner* and the other two from the rival *Richmond Enquirer*, fired pistols at one another in the rotunda of the Virginia General Assembly while it was in session. Six bullets whizzed around the hallowed antechamber, though the only injury was to “half a tassel on the cane of the marble statue of Washington.” The cause of the fracas was an exchange of opinions recently printed in the two papers—an *Examiner* article accusing two rival newspapers of seeking corrupt government printing contracts like “vultures” over the “carcass” of the state treasury and an *Enquirer* challenge “calling on [the *Examiner*] to name the person referred to or stand convicted of falsehood.”¹ Days later, the owner and editor who did the shooting for the *Examiner*, H. Rives Pollard, was so offended by the news brief in the *New York Times* that he assaulted the writer, E. P. Brooks, in the lobby of the Spotswood Hotel. Pollard tried to horsewhip Brooks, but instead fell into a wrestling tangle that broke through a plate-glass window.² Brooks, writing in the *Times* about this second incident, said he did as well as he could considering he was struck by “a man twice my size and strength, who was armed, whereas I was not, and who chose his own time and place for attacking me, surrounding himself with his own friends, whereas I stood on my own merits, alone, amongst the chivalry.”³

Such violence among the ruins of Richmond, in the shell-shocked smolder following the Civil War, may seem to represent nothing but the chaos of that time and place. Yet the two connected outbursts

speak to a larger social structure that can be found throughout the nineteenth-century South, before and after the Civil War. The *Examiner* article that led to the gunplay in the state capitol may have seemed too trivial for the *New York Times* to explain, beyond calling it an article “on public printing.” Clearly, to the Richmond editors, it was a matter of principle worth dying, or killing, to defend. The *Examiner* had cast aspersions on two other newspapers, specifically naming the *Enquirer*. An *Enquirer* editor sought to clear his name, and called the *Examiner* a liar if it failed to be more specific. These were public matters in a sense that is quite distinct from what we mean by a mass “public” today. They related to what one historian calls “primal honor.” The audience was not an abstract public, but a more archaic “society” that mattered to such Southern editors as Pollard and his adversaries. Primal honor made the opinion of people in one’s social circle inextricably tied to inner worth.⁴ Thus, the contests were necessarily presented to that society’s spectators in a legislative hall and a hotel lobby. The editors were steeped in the social dynamics of dueling, even if they ignored the etiquette of the code duello in these two cases.⁵ The *New York Times* was astute to call these affrays “chivalry” in the original headline and in Brooks’s personal account; indeed, Brooks’s tone of mockery was probably the very thing that most offended Pollard. Both the *Examiner* and the *Enquirer* had a long history of dueling editors with a penchant for peppery editorials that invited challenges on the field of honor. *Examiner* editor Pollard had inherited the dueling pistols of his predecessor, John Moncure Daniel, a fire-eating secessionist who fought and survived nine duels.⁶ In 1846, the *Enquirer*’s editor, Thomas Ritchie Jr., killed the editor of the *Richmond Whig*, John Hampden Pleasants, in one of the most notorious duels in American history. Armed with swords and pistols, the two advanced on one another—shooting, then slashing. Pleasants died two days later; Ritchie was arrested and tried, but as in virtually all cases of duelists brought to trial, was acquitted.⁷

Armed violence has a long and long-forgotten history in American journalism, particularly in the nineteenth-century South. John Nerone, in his *Violence against the Press*, elaborates on this history to argue that anti-press violence of all sorts—by individuals and mobs up through the present day—can be viewed as a form of political expression



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marking periods of upheaval in American history. In this context, Nerone quotes an antebellum South Carolina politician who sees dueling as “an appeal to public opinion.” Nerone’s limited discussion of the Southern duel and Southern rituals of honor correctly situates such practices as peculiar to the region and period. But the significance of those peculiarities drops away in his sweeping and theoretical scheme of violence throughout American media history, including acts calculated to impose a news agenda on modern media.⁸ This article attempts to revive an interest in this more narrow lost history, and to suggest some underlying themes that perhaps have more relevance to the meaning of a free press than previously assumed.

The historian Clement Eaton, writing in 1940 about freedom of the press in the antebellum South, remarked that Southern newspaper editors suffered an astonishing rate of mortality as a result of the so-called code of honor.⁹ No class of Southerner, perhaps, went to the dueling ground more frequently than newspaper editors, John Hope Franklin observed in 1956.¹⁰ Of course, the South was not the only place where editorial disputes turned violent. Lambert Wilmer, in his 1859 book decrying the violence of the American press, placed the first editorial duel, between printers Mathew Carey and Col. Ebenezer Oswald, in Philadelphia in 1785. “[A] controversy . . . which began in type-metal was terminated with leaden bullets,” he wrote.¹¹ A British traveler in the 1830s commented that a majority of American newspaper editors “are constantly practicing with the pistol, that they may be ready when called upon, and are most of them very good shots.”¹² But as one twentieth-century Southern editor wrote, south of the Mason-Dixon line was where “the pistol seems to have remained longest as the essential adjunct of the pen.”¹³

The code duello was woven into Southern politics long after the code lost what little respectability it had in the North with the infamous Aaron Burr-Alexander Hamilton duel in New Jersey in 1804.¹⁴ The South’s style of journalism also remained more old-fashioned. While in the North a more politically neutral and news-filled press developed with the penny press, Southern newspaper editors tended to engage in eighteenth-century practices of personal, opinionated journalism. This style mixed dangerously with antiquated codes of honor and violence. Partisan and personal attacks on local figures seemed to beg for trouble. When a judge in Charleston, South Carolina, was targeted by such an attack in 1856 in Robert Barnwell Rhett’s *Charleston Mercury*, the judge’s brother challenged the editor, Rhett’s nephew William R. Taber Jr., to a duel. Taber accepted—a “gentleman” could hardly risk the shame of declining—and was killed on the third shot, despite the fact that the anonymous article in question was written not by Taber but by his cousin Edmund Rhett.¹⁵ A far coarser violence of “rough-and-tumble”—featuring eye-gouging, groin-kicking, and sometimes-fatal boxing—characterized a lower-class, backwoods and longer-surviving Southern custom. But even such brawling shared with dueling a primal notion of male valor that scholar Elliott Gorn summarized this way, citing Bartram Wyatt-Brown: “Honorable men guarded their reputations, bristled at insults, and, where necessary, sought personal vindication through bloodshed.”¹⁶ Editors were in the forefront of such violence. In the frontier culture of antebellum Mississippi, the *Vicksburg Sentinel* had five editors in a row killed or wounded in gun violence prompted by the paper’s inflammatory editorials.¹⁷ John Moncure Daniel, the *Richmond Examiner* editor who is credited with fighting nine duels, labeled his political enemies as if rendering a political cartoon—“jackass,” “hyena,” “sleek fat pony,” and “curly-headed poodle.” Something he wrote in 1847 also insulted the writer Edgar Allan Poe, although the nature of the slight remains obscure. When Poe barged into Daniel’s office to challenge him to a duel, the *Examiner* editor managed to silence the tipsy Poe by pointing to a set of large pistols waiting on a table to be employed.¹⁸ Occasionally, newspaper

editors themselves initiated the challenge, and their adversaries were often editors at rival newspapers. In 1852, for example, Daniel duelled with the editor of the competing Whig paper to settle a petty argument about the artistic merits of a sculpture.¹⁹ And in 1873, the founder of the *Atlanta Herald*, Alexander H. St. Clair-Abrams, was arrested for setting out to fight a duel with the founder of the *Atlanta Constitution*.²⁰

Given the reality of dueling as an occupational hazard for these newspaper editors, it seems a strange case of historical amnesia that the phenomenon is now ignored or at most, merely chuckled over. The dismissing process began before the nineteenth century was finished. Pistol-packing editors and magnolia-shadowed Quixotes appeared all too pathetic, or comic, to an industrial-age mindset. *Louisville Courier-Journal* editor Henry Watterson, a symbol of the emerging New South of the late nineteenth century, looked down on his predecessors as hacks who “wrote fierce nonsense, and fought duels, and hiccupped Fourth of July orations every day of the year in exceeding bad grammar.” To Watterson, that era of journalism in the South was a big joke, “considerably drunken and blood-stained.”²¹ Mark Twain, in his story “Journalism in Tennessee,” depicted the Southern press as a hilarious apocalypse of news-office violence.²²

Over time, standard textbooks of press history have lost interest in the phenomenon. In 1873, Frederic Hudson’s *Journalism in the United States: From 1690 to 1872*, indexed twenty-two references to duels in 789 pages. Hudson, a journalist for thirty years with the *New York Herald*, saw the practice as widespread, but dying. “It is probable that the details of all the duels, assaults, and assassinations in the journalistic world would fill several volumes like this,” he wrote. “But these affairs are closing up in this country.”²³ In 1941, Mott’s *American Journalism*, with 772 pages, cites only seven references to duels in the index, not all of them involving journalists. Mott writes that most of the assaults and duels issuing from newspaper comments are “scarcely significant, except as they show the customs of the time.”²⁴ Although Nerone counted seventy-one duels involving newspapermen, and supposed this to be vastly under-counting, recent textbooks have nothing in the index about dueling.²⁵

Dueling was the ritualized enactment of a set of beliefs. These beliefs involved notions of public truthfulness, valor, and masculine demands for respect in a seigniorial society. In the antebellum South, these beliefs fell under the aegis of a gentleman’s “honor.” In earlier centuries, the word honor was synonymous with a nobleman’s “dignity.”²⁶ But with the development of an egalitarian (and evangelical) society, dignity came to apply generally to every citizen or individual, while “honor” required a hierarchical social order into which individuals were born.²⁷ Honor was not something that could be created by one’s own efforts, although it could be lost by one’s misdeeds. It was inextricably linked to what others said about a person. If challenged or insulted, honor could be defended outside of the legal system, although it was also accounted for in English common law.²⁸ Honor was not the same as professional “reputation,” which is a private good that can be measured as property and compensated in modern tort law. Rather, honor was a social good, the respect due to a person of high estate—a gentleman—in a society that agreed to such an anachronistic order.²⁹

The way this notion of honor operated in the nineteenth-century South may seem too peculiar or self-serving to be taken seriously as a post-modern inquiry. Still, honor seems to lie at the center of a past culture that produced duels, editorial battles, and other extra-legal conflicts, as well as the vast bloodletting of the Civil War. Wyatt-Brown prefaced his comprehensive study of Southern honor with a comment that this “most important aspect of antebellum ethics” had been consigned by Southern historians since the 1950s to the trash bin

of history. The old idea of honor, he writes, was dismissed as a fig leaf covering the naked brutality of a slaveholding system. Wyatt-Brown disagrees, arguing that this reductive theory fails to account for the complexity of the belief system.³⁰ A truly empirical examination of the historical record regarding Southern honor somewhat complicates the picture, to say the least. This is also true for any attempt to explain the survival of dueling in the nineteenth century, an era of industrial and professional ascendancy. Southern dueling, which continued into the 1890s,³¹ belonged to an aristocratic order that is of no particular interest to social or political science. But for historians, it is precisely the oddness of the thing that ought to invite our curiosity.

Looking at the peculiar facts surrounding guns and honor in the early Southern press, one faces some intriguing questions. Was this the South's method of restraining editors from "the slanderous personality of their writings," as Southern novelist William Gilmore Simms suggested in 1841 to a northern magazine editor?³² ("Personality" is used here in an older sense from U.S. law and journalism, "referring to a particular person or persons, esp. in a disparaging or offensive way,"—Oxford English Dictionary.) How could an editor's criticism of an individual ever have become a matter to be settled not by public opinion or a libel suit, but by mortal combat?³³ Colonial printer Benjamin Franklin once wrote that duels were used in the misty past to determine lawsuits under the theory that Providence would favor truth in a balanced contest. He could not understand why such a murderous superstition continued to be practiced in America.³⁴ The primitive idea that liars would be revealed and vanquished in a literal fight seems to be behind Milton's well-known metaphor in his "Areopagitica" of 1645 justifying a free press: "Let [truth] and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?"³⁵ But is the truth-telling function of the press worth literally dying for? Whether duels were a valid test of the truth, they were expected to test courage, and thus measure whether the principals were true gentlemen under the old chivalric code. "Coward" and "craven" were common insults of published challenges and resentments in dueling, and brave conduct during the duel was carefully reported afterwards, whether principals missed, killed, or were themselves struck dead.³⁶ As dueling declined after the Civil War, Southern editors faced a new danger of outright assassination in the city streets. This is how *Examiner* editor H. Rives Pollard was murdered in Richmond in 1868—two years after his shootout in the Virginia State Capitol. Also gunned down in their line of work were *Charleston News & Courier* editor Francis Warrington Dawson in Charleston in 1889, and Narciso G. Gonzales in Columbia, in 1903. Were such shootings a degeneration of the same bloody ethic, or something entirely different from the duel?

The history of dueling has produced much popular storytelling as well as scholarship. Since newspapers figure so prominently in this history, many of the scholarly studies are about editors. For example, Barbara J. Griffin's analysis of private letters casts doubt on the popular assumption that *Richmond Enquirer* founder Thomas Ritchie Sr. disapproved of dueling.³⁷ An article in *Mississippi Quarterly* argues that Samuel Clemens ran away from his editorial post at the Virginia City, Nevada, *Territorial Enterprise* after challenging a rival editor to a duel in 1863, and that this cowardice was behind an obsession with the theme of dueling in the writings of his later personae, Mark Twain.³⁸ To probe the questions I am raising here, I have examined the cases of

three Southern editors whose careers were marked by violence. They represent a diversity of positions in terms of this history of ink and blood. If that history has any meaning for the press that emerged in the twentieth century—if the code duello contained virtues and brutalities that survived in new forms—then these three editors delineate that transformation. The subjects examined here are O. Jennings Wise, editor of the *Richmond Enquirer* from 1857 to 1861, when he enlisted to fight and die for the Confederacy; William Gannaway Brownlow, a lifelong political brawler who was a Methodist preacher, a Reconstruction governor and U.S. senator, and editor of a series of East Tennessee newspapers from 1839 until his death in 1877; and Francis Warrington Dawson, an Englishman who boarded a steamer to join the Confederate army and ended up cofounding the influential *Charleston News & Courier*, which he edited until he was murdered in 1889.

O. Jennings Wise (1832-1862)

When dueling was in its heyday among the planter class of the antebellum South, it was vehemently opposed by many newspaper editors north and south, and even by some members of the Southern elite. A Charleston, South Carolina, minister in 1807 preached that the principles, origins, and effects of dueling deserve only contempt, and another in 1844 called it a "barbarous practice."³⁹ Anti-dueling societies were formed in cities from Savannah, Georgia, to New Orleans. J.D.B. De Bow, before he founded the South's most prominent magazine defending slavery and promoting Southern nationalism, excelled as a student debater at the College of Charleston based on papers he produced on "the horrors of dueling," among other reform-minded topics.⁴⁰ But moral and economic opposition had no effect when a Southern aristocrat felt his honor slighted or faced a proper challenge. Some defended the practice as a restraint on more violent impulses and an enforcer of social order. Dueling may have restrained editors from careless slander, as Simms suggested. Where dueling was banned, the number of court cases for slander and libel tended to rise.⁴¹ A number of booklets were produced on the rules of the code. Former South Carolina Governor John Lyde Wilson, who published one of the more reliable of these pamphlets, insisted that he was merely trying to save lives by educating duelists on the proper steps to seek reconciliation and avoid indiscriminate shooting.⁴² Defenders and opponents generally agreed on one point: Dueling was rooted in a romantic past that was being banished by modernity.

O. Jennings Wise was the perfect representative of that fading past. He was only twenty-five and bored with practicing law when he bought and became a co-editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, one of the most distinguished newspapers in the South. Wise was a radiant flower of Southern privilege, a talented son of Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise (who had been the "second" of Congressman William Graves of Kentucky in the infamous 1838 duel that killed Congressman Jonathan Cilley of Maine).⁴³ The governor's son studied law at William & Mary and spent his late youth in Europe serving in various diplomatic posts and acquiring skills as a fencer, dancer, and lover of opera.⁴⁴ Acquiring a newspaper such as the *Enquirer* at this time was the equivalent of entering politics without having to get elected. Other sons of southern governors had done the same. John Forsyth, the son and namesake of a Georgia governor and U.S. secretary of state, edited the vociferously Democratic *Mobile Daily Register* from 1837 through its fiery years of



O. Jennings Wise. Public domain.

resisting Reconstruction. John Hampden Pleasants, son of Virginia Governor James Pleasants, was the powerful editor of the *Richmond Whig* when he was killed in a duel in 1846, at age forty-nine.⁴⁵ When young Jennings Wise added his last name to those of “Ritchie, Dunnavant, & Tyler” on the masthead of the *Richmond Enquirer*, it had declined in stature since the formidable editor Thomas Ritchie Sr. had turned it over in 1845 to two sons (one of whom shot Pleasants in that notorious duel). Wise gave the *Enquirer* a fresh literary energy.⁴⁶

He helped fill his newspaper with reverence for his generation’s political elders and their ideals, particularly on the delicate matters of slavery and union. Thomas Jefferson, the *Enquirer* said, looked toward the eventual extinction of slavery, not immediately like “the modern Abolitionists,” but gradually and with deportation.⁴⁷ Wise was a pallbearer and speaker at a ceremony in New York City when dignitaries delivered the remains of James Madison to the steamer *Jamestown* to be returned to his native Virginia. “It is his example that we are assembled to embalm in the hearts of the people,” Wise said in his speech, which he ran in his newspaper, “the first great example of unswerving devotion to truth and liberty — the example of patriotism, which found no sacrifice too great for his country’s good — the example of enduring application to every branch of study which could be wielded for her benefit, and the many examples of priceless wisdom which he has imprinted upon her history for her future guidance and her destiny.”⁴⁸ Wise’s filio-piety was at its keenest, however, when he was defending his father, the current governor. Once, when Governor Wise was making a speech in Richmond, an acquaintance interrupted with hostile questions, apparently believing the governor was speaking in support of protective tariffs. Jennings Wise spoke to the questioner later, and felt “authorized” to explain in the *Enquirer* that the “esteemed fellow-townsmen” had misunderstood the governor and “had no intention to disturb the harmony of the assemblage.”⁴⁹

His defense of his father was less genteel outside the pages of the *Enquirer*. When Robert Ridgeway, then-editor of the *Richmond Whig*, blasted Governor Wise as an idiot and madman, the son retaliated by caning Ridgeway in his office.⁵⁰ Jennings Wise was too gentle by nature to have enemies or draw insults, but he was finely tuned to respond with arms when his father was defamed. This occurred frequently, as Governor Wise became the object of much political abuse in Virginia during the run-up to the Civil War. During the two years he was editor of the *Enquirer*, Jennings Wise fought eight duels over attacks on his father that appeared in other newspapers. “Quick and hot and insulting came [the son’s] reply to every comment of this kind,” wrote Jennings Wise’s younger brother John in an 1899 memoir. “Then followed, in due course, the inquiry as to authorship, the avowal, the demand of a retraction, the refusal, the challenge, the duel.”⁵¹ In other words, editor Wise was a punctilious devotee of the code, an etiquette that was meant to lead to a fair and honorable, though sometimes bloody, conclusion.⁵²

Wise held no ill will towards those he challenged, according to his brother. His genial spirit was in accord with the highest ideals of the code. According to Governor Wilson’s book on the code, a challenger’s note should be in the language of a gentleman “cautiously avoiding attributing to the adverse party any improper motive.”⁵³ His brother later recalled with amazement the cheerful respect Wise maintained for his dueling partners. “I could not conceive the mental or moral processes by which my sweet brother, who never quarreled with

anybody, could bring himself, without anger, to shoot at another man with deadly intent,” wrote John Wise. Furthermore, on closely re-reading the newspaper articles that supposedly led to such duels, the younger brother claimed he could not find anything to justify gunplay.

In such aristocratic circles, skill with weaponry had no connection with the honor involved. Jennings Wise’s knowledge of the code may have been as sharp as his European skills in fencing, but he was a terrible marksman. In the eight duels he fought, only once did he hit his opponent, and that was after the opponent demanded a second round of shots. In another duel, not wanting even to aim at a near-sighted adversary who had already wasted his one shot, Wise fired harmlessly into the air. Perhaps Wise’s nonchalance, like a magic charm, somehow saved him from ever being struck in return. His younger brother John, a dueling enthusiast as a boy who fought one of the last duels in Virginia in 1882,⁵⁴ noted that his brother remained devout in his religion and kind toward others while conducting his serial duels. “[W]hen I saw him say his prayers at night, and go to church, and mingle in gay society, just as he had done before, the mystery only deepened.”⁵⁵ He died as a Confederate captain fighting on the coast of North Carolina.

Tocqueville, contemplating what he termed “feudal honor,” also noted the paradoxical mix of universal moral laws with a capricious code that applied only to a narrow class. He ascribed the phenomenon to the elite’s particular needs for order and power in a non-democratic society.⁵⁶ From this perspective, Jennings Wise’s piety and dueling fit with his father’s moral dedication to the code of dueling. Governor Wise believed that rule-bound dueling was an essential mechanism for maintaining courtesy and deference in a

“community of gentlemen.” Its danger, he felt, was its virtue in that this made gentlemen careful not to provoke each other. Honor was costly, but a principle can not be weighed against convenience. “The mental and moral absolutism taken to himself by the duelist of that day,” wrote son John Wise about his father, “would seem to have rested upon the notion that the right to demand respect and courtesy with absolute fearlessness, and to kill anybody who denied those inherent rights, was God-given, and that the enforcement of those rights was not offensive to the Deity.”⁵⁷

William G. Brownlow (1805-1877)

A furious indictment of American journalism was published in 1859 under the title *Our Press Gang, or A Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers*. The book’s author, Lambert A. Wilmer, a Baltimore writer who had been unhappily trapped in newspaper work for thirty years, built a prosecutorial case that the press was committing horrible crimes against the United States, from debasing democracy to inciting murder and rebellion.⁵⁸ Mott calls it “a rather ridiculous book” with a lot of interesting material on the press, but “most of it discreditable.”⁵⁹ In any case, as a polemic from this period by an insider, the book provides a valuable picture of a rambunctious and violent press that is easy to overlook more than a century and a half later. Wilmer calls dueling “savagely and unreasonable,” citing nineteen cases of duels by editors and blaming this “fantastic foolery” on the licentiousness of newspapers. But dueling was a minor problem among editors, in Wilmer’s droll view, because it was “a gentlemanly vice.” The greater problem was un-governed brawling, “unmitigated ruffianism,” which Wilmer compared unfavorably with “the rules and principles of



William G. Brownlow. Public domain.

equitable warfare.” “It is probable that an editor is flogged, in some part of the United States, almost every day in the year,” he writes, adding for good measure that “many journalists who escape castigation certainly deserve it.”⁶⁰

William Gannaway Brownlow, whom Hodding Carter II called possibly the most colorful newspaper editor of the pre- and postwar South,⁶¹ was a feisty, frontier-style newspaper editor and Methodist preacher in East Tennessee. He was famous for using his Whig newspapers to ignite fights that mixed politics, religion, and personal insult. These brawls often spilled out into physical violence against him. Mobs or weapons, typically, further stirred the fires of Brownlow’s flamboyant writing and public speaking. “He assails his foes with the pen, and thunders at them from the stump and the pulpit,” wrote the *Louisville Journal*, “and if they want any thing more of him, he shrinks not from encountering them with fist, or knife, or pistol.” Wilmer cites this quote in an appendix only to comment sarcastically, “It seems that clergymen themselves are be-deviled when they become editors.”⁶² To Wilmer, Brownlow was a marginal representative of the rustic version of violent journalism. But Brownlow was actually a prominent representative of the style.

Born in western Virginia in 1805, Brownlow was the oldest of five children of Joseph A. Brownlow and Catharine Gannaway, who were from farming families of middling means, though both slaveholders. At age eleven, Brownlow lost both parents to illness within three months, and was sent to live with relatives. At eighteen, he was apprenticed to a house-carpenter in Abington, Virginia, and at twenty, converted to Methodism at a backwoods camp meeting. Soon after, he became a circuit-riding preacher, traveling the Southern mountains for the next ten years. “I availed myself of this position to study and improve my limited education, which I did in all the English branches,” he wrote in a memoir.⁶³

The battles he fought over the course of his long career have been recorded by historians in a tone of amazement or ridicule, as if Brownlow were a comic-opera buffoon. “His favorite method,” wrote one of the more recent of these commentators, “was to chastise and ridicule his opponents, and few men could do so with as much venomous wit as he.”⁶⁴ Brownlow’s biographer in the 1930s, E. Merton Coulton, described Brownlow’s editorial style this way:

He had an extravagance of expression and a sharp cutting diatribe which reckoned little the limits of good taste and tact. His language had a wild earthy flavor which it might be thought only the most rugged and inaccessible parts of the Southern Highlands could have produced, a language as impervious to outside polish and associations as his will was unbending in the face of the enemy. The frontier soon outgrew the barbarity of physical gouging, but the Parson never gave up his literary gouging.⁶⁵

His “literary gouging” was done in court, in the town square, and in the pages of his *Whig*, which he started in Elizabethton, Tennessee, in 1839 and later moved to Jonesboro, then to Knoxville.

Brownlow was the antithesis of a refined Tidewater gentleman like Jennings Wise. He did not follow the code of dueling. But he displayed, in his own fashion, the fearlessness of a duelist and the gentle nature, in private, of a Jennings Wise. But in public, he was explosive. He accused his enemies of being drunks, debauchees, gamblers, perjurers, thieves, swindlers, and the like. In 1840, less than a year after he started publishing his first newspaper in tiny Elizabethton, someone fired two bullets into Brownlow’s house, barely missing his head. He gave chase, shooting at the fleeing assailant. Having expected an attack by a mob that night, Brownlow had a friend close by, also armed, whose shots at

the would-be assassin failed for lack of firing caps. Brownlow moved his press to Jonesboro, as if to gain a larger population to insult. He proudly claimed that his newspaper’s wholesale abuse of individuals had no parallel in the history American journalism, attributing this to the fact “that it has been peculiarly our misfortune to have to encounter a disciplined corps, of the most obdurate sinners, and unprincipled scoundrels, that ever annoyed any community.”⁶⁶ He met the editor of the rival paper for a fight in the streets of Jonesboro. Armed with a pistol and a sword cane, Brownlow ascertained that the other editor was unarmed, so grabbed him in a headlock and began thrashing him with the cane. Brownlow had been fooled. The other editor carried a concealed sidearm, and shot Brownlow in the thigh. After that, their battle was continued in the pages of their newspapers. In 1842, Brownlow was attacked by a club-wielding mob at a camp meeting. He swirled around and shot at the ringleader with a derringer, but no bullet issued when the cap fired. When a fellow Methodist accused Brownlow of having stolen some jewelry during a Whig convention, four other newspapers from Georgia to Massachusetts gleefully reported the charge. Brownlow retaliated by printing charges that the editors were “convicted liars” collectively, and individually, each guilty of various other sins and crimes. The citizens of Jonesboro contemplated sacking his press. In 1848, Brownlow was seriously clubbed by a man he had charged in his newspaper with being an army deserter. The experience only made Brownlow more reckless in his attack-dog journalism. A lover of newspaper mottos, he put atop his editorial page, “Be just and fear not.”⁶⁷

Northern papers were discovering a new way to appeal to working-class readers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, by reducing the cost to a penny and maintaining independence from established political parties.⁶⁸ But in the more agrarian South, grandiloquent controversy, political rancor, and emotional ad hominem attacks still sold papers. Readers complained about *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal*, but more of them read it than read the two established Knoxville papers. By 1861, the circulation had grown five-fold to 10,700 subscribers—still small compared to the 45,000 subscribers of Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, but large for the South. Brownlow was read and talked about well beyond the mountains of East Tennessee.⁶⁹

After the Civil War, Brownlow’s duties as Reconstruction governor and then U.S. senator took him away from the *Whig*, which he had re-started in 1863 with a gift of \$1,500 from his sometime political enemy Andrew Johnson. His age left him with a tremor that made writing impossible. Still, he occasionally dictated columns signed “Senior Editor.” On January 6, 1869, he sold Brownlow’s *Knoxville Whig*. When he finally vacated his seat in the U.S. Senate in 1875, he returned to Knoxville to “die hurrahing,” as his late friend Thaddeus Stephens had urged him. Though too feeble to run a newspaper, he became a partner with William Rule, who had started the *Knoxville Chronicle* in 1870.

Rule had previously worked for Brownlow at the *Whig* in 1860, first as a mail clerk then as a reporter. Together, starting in 1875, Brownlow and Rule ran the *Weekly Whig and Chronicle* and the *Knoxville Daily Chronicle* until Brownlow’s death two years later.⁷⁰ Rule, who had served in the Union Army of Tennessee during the Civil War, was a new kind of editor, rejecting Brownlow’s partisan flair in favor of dependable facts. In 1873, Rule declined a challenge to a duel from a reader, telling him that nothing would be gained “by either of us losing his life in the manner proposed.”⁷¹

New York Times patriarch Adolph Ochs was a printer’s devil and journeyman typesetter at the *Knoxville Chronicle* from 1872 to 1875; Brownlow was co-owner just after this, from 1875 to 1877.⁷² Born in Ohio in 1858 to Jewish immigrants who moved to Knoxville in 1864, Ochs began work at age eleven as a carrier for the *Knoxville Chronicle*,

then quit school at fourteen to work fulltime. He was joined by two younger brothers at the paper. He called the newspaper “my high school and my university.” In 1879, at age twenty, he managed to buy a half interest in the *Chattanooga Daily Times* and in 1896, he bought the well-regarded but unprofitable *New York Times*.⁷³ From that time until his death in 1935, Ochs built the *New York Times* into what was considered the most influential newspaper in the world. In doing so, he established the standards that defined objective, balanced journalism in the twentieth century. Ochs spelled out those standards—the meaning behind the Delphic motto “All the News That’s Fit to Print”—in a carefully phrased statement in the first issue of his *New York Times* on August 19, 1896. The newspaper would be “clean, dignified and trustworthy,” giving the news “impartially, without fear or favor, regardless of party, sect or interest involved.”⁷⁴

Many streams fed the *Times*’s practice of objectivity, of course. But an intriguing research note in *American Journalism* in 1991 suggests that Ochs’s revulsion to Brownlow may have played a key role.⁷⁵ Although Brownlow was not involved in running the *Knoxville Chronicle* until the year Ochs left, the young apprentice was fully aware of the old brawler’s style. “In the small world of Knoxville newspaperdom everyone knew everyone else,” wrote Gerald W. Johnson in a 1946 biography of Ochs.⁷⁶ Julius Ochs, his father, once complained that Brownlow “referred to me contemptuously as a ‘— Jew.’” Two years after Brownlow died in 1877, Adolph Ochs wrote disparagingly of him in the *Chattanooga Times* as a violent and dangerous man. Ochs said Brownlow was “a harsh man; a reliable hater; not particularly to be politically consistent, eager to carry any point he set his head or heart on; endowed with a violent temper and a vindictive nature.”⁷⁷

Ochs especially loathed Brownlow’s armed combat, as he admired Rule’s declining a challenge to a duel. “It is not necessary that an editor and publisher should be a pugilist or a duelist,” Ochs said to the National Editorial Association in June 1891, “but it is necessary that he be made of such stuff that he fears no one who prides himself on these barbarous characteristics.”⁷⁸ Dueling, to Ochs, was a fiction out of Sir Walter Scott, but violent fighting was part of the frontier culture in which he grew up. He faced violent enemies in his early years at the *Chattanooga Times*, and according to biographer Johnson, his brother George Ochs engaged in at least two armed encounters with such men, shooting one and nearly being shot by the other.⁷⁹ Journalism built on reliable facts and un-bought opinion was less likely to inspire such violence, but Ochs was nevertheless committed to publishing it “without fear of consequences.”⁸⁰ In this, Ochs inherited something of the fearlessness of the duelist, but rejected the temper of the frontier brawler.

Francis Warrington Dawson (1840-1889)

After 1876, when Congress agreed to withdraw federal troops from the South and end the post-War project of Reconstruction, an era of adjustment both transformed and, paradoxically, preserved the social structures of the former Confederacy. On the economic front, Southern states opened up their farms, forests, mineral wealth, and cheap labor to massive exploitation by northern capital and industrial combinations. A new southern leadership emerged, partly from the old planter class and partly from a growing professional clique.⁸¹ Beginning in the 1890s, new state constitutions sanctioned a system of Jim Crow

segregation that “adjusted” industrial needs to a deep-seated racial inequality. As an example of how the old ways mixed oddly with the New South, historian C. Vann Woodward cites a dispute between a local railroad line out of Rome, Georgia, and the powerful Richmond Terminal system, which sought to buy up that railroad as part of a national consolidation. In 1889, the president of the small local line and the lead attorney for the Richmond consortium, who happened to be a grandson of Southern firebrand John C. Calhoun, settled their business differences by dueling at twelve paces in a clearing in the woods near the train tracks. Neither man was hit.⁸²

Perhaps no one symbolized the curious braiding of the old and new in this period more than Francis Warrington Dawson, editor of the influential Charleston, South Carolina, *News & Courier*. He was a leading apostle for the New South creed of industrialization (Woodward calls him one of the most forceful propagandists for cotton mills), but was also an old-fashioned idealist and romantic. This mix set him against dueling, but in a way that preserved some of the beliefs and behaviors said to underlie the code.

He was born in London, England, in 1840 under another name. Austin John Reeks (pronounced Riks) was the eldest son in a proud family, one of the oldest Catholic lines in England. He was at the start of a gentleman’s Grand Tour and education in France, like his father and grandfather before him, when an inheritance promised from an aunt was snatched away by cousins. It was an age of Revolution, and so, defying his father, he stowed away on a blockade-running steamer in 1861 to join the Confederacy. Like Poe, another aristocrat who felt cheated of an inheritance, Reeks went to war under a *nom de guerre*. He felt the South was fighting “as the

Barons fought at Runnymede, for the liberty and self government and that it was my duty, as an English-speaking man, to take a hand in the fight.”⁸³

He fought honorably, by all accounts, at a dozen well-known battles. He was wounded three times and captured once. After the war, he sought his fortune in Richmond, amazed at the opportunities before him and still loyal to the Lost Cause. He felt he had brought such honor to the name Dawson, he decided to keep it. While becoming a favorite at Richmond parties, he began his journalism career as an assistant at the *Richmond Examiner*. This was the newspaper where the Pollard brothers were notorious for their fiery editorials and violent gunplay, including the shootout by H. Rives Pollard in the Virginia state capitol in 1866. Dawson had the “unpleasant position” of serving as editor Rives Pollard’s “advisor and best man” for his major duels. A colleague at the *Examiner* with fifteen years’ experience at other papers in New Orleans and Charleston recommended Dawson to Col. Robert Barnwell Rhett, called “the father of secession,” at the *Charleston Mercury*. In 1867, Dawson and his colleague bought the ailing *Charleston News*. Aggressively battling the much older *Charleston Courier* during the next six years, the two finally won the newspaper war. They acquired the rival paper and launched the combined *Charleston News & Courier* on April 7, 1873.⁸⁴

Dawson, as editor of Charleston’s monopoly paper for the next sixteen years, became a leading proponent of the New South with fellow editors Henry Grady in Atlanta and Henry Watterson in Louisville. He wrote well, with a forceful and high-minded prose. Like Watterson, also a Confederate veteran, Dawson played the old-fashioned role of a powerful political editor to advance the new-fangled cause of Southern



Francis Warrington Dawson.
Public domain.

commerce. As one historian put it, he urged a moderate policy in an abrasive rhetorical style.⁸⁵

Dawson's record as a reformer is mixed. His pragmatic concern for South Carolina's national reputation seemed on occasion to compromise his principles. For example, after backing state regulation of railroads, he cut back his newspaper's coverage when national railroad interests brazenly bought off the legislature to abolish such regulation in 1883. He switched positions editorially as well, and backed de-regulation at the state level. "The whole thing was disgusting and demoralizing," wrote the *News & Courier's* star reporter, Narciso G. Gonzales, who covered the legislative fiasco. "I tried to expose it but was muzzled. The paper flopped, also, in the nick of time."⁸⁶ Dawson also flip-flopped on the one issue where Southern whites had to be especially cautious—race. In the summer of 1874, a drunken mob of local whites engaged in armed combat with a unit of black militia in Hamburg, South Carolina, after that unit had detained two whites passing through the town. Killed in the "Hamburg Riots" were one white and at least six blacks, apparently shot after being disarmed. Dawson led the cry of indignation against the white mob. Public opinion generally shared this feeling, but Dawson overstepped the line of permitted white opinion by indicting the politics of the most extreme faction of state Democrats, known as "Straight-outs." Dawson's political enemies stepped up their attacks on the *News & Courier*. An ex-Confederate general who led the Straight-out movement around Hamburg challenged Dawson to a duel, which evaporated in a haze of published resentments from both sides. Col. Robert Barnwell Rhett, then editor of the *Journal of Commerce*, also challenged Dawson to a duel. In an abortive ritual combining the code duello and the movie "High Noon," Rhett strode up Broad Street with a retinue from his staff, most of them presumably carrying side arms. Dawson and his brother-in-law appeared across the street, unarmed on principle, as Rhett knew. Nothing was said, no guns drawn. The next day, the ritual was repeated. With this, apparently, Rhett gained his satisfaction.⁸⁷ It was not the duelists, but the readers who finally got to Dawson. His circulation plummeted, and after four weeks, he reversed his politics on Hamburg. He now condemned the black "insurrectionists" and praised the Straight-out Democrats. As one historian wryly notes, Dawson "got right on race."⁸⁸

Dueling, unlike the Southern politics of race, did not require Dawson to adjust his scruples: He opposed it on moral grounds, as a Roman Catholic. His anti-dueling editorials were in keeping with the *News & Courier's* crusade against gun violence and two other public vices, gambling and drinking. Dawson's campaign to make South Carolina attractive to northern industrialists called for a civilized respect for law and order. The code duello, ineffectively outlawed in South Carolina since 1812, had become a national embarrassment to civic boosters like Dawson. "The keynote of Captain Francis W. Dawson's policy," reminisced a later editor of the *News & Courier*, ". . . was 'law enforcement,' especially the enforcement of the law against duelists, lynchers, all men of violence."⁸⁹

In the summer of 1880, the political boss of upcountry Chesterfield County, South Carolina, Colonel Ellerbe Boggan Crawford Cash, fatally shot Colonel William McCreight Shannon in the third volley of a duel at Dubose's Bridge, Darlington County. The duel troubled the political leaders of the state. Many refused to attack the code of gentlemen, but felt that the brutality of the Cash-Shannon match marked a betrayal of that code. Senator Matthew C. Butler, in a letter to Dawson, lamented that the old style of "punctilious decorum and chivalric courtesy" had given way to a "swashbuckler style" that permitted correspondence full of coarse insults and boasting.⁹⁰ Dawson exploited the controversy to push for tougher anti-dueling legislation. Although Dawson demonized Cash in print and locked him out of having his say in any of the major newspapers in the state, the editor grudgingly accepted Cash's acquittal on murder charges. By then,

Dawson had the satisfaction of getting his anti-dueling law passed. A few years later, Pope Gregory XVI knighted Dawson in the Order of Saint Gregory the Great for his crusade against dueling.⁹¹

Dawson's end came on the afternoon of March 12, 1889, in an ambiguous mix of the gentleman's code and lawless brutality. Dawson, then 48, had learned that a young married neighbor, Dr. Thomas Ballard McDow, had been seen in an apparent dalliance with the Dawson's strikingly beautiful twenty-two-year-old Swiss governess. Dawson, entering the doctor's house holding a walking cane, told McDow he knew about his "ungentlemanly conduct towards one of my servants" and forbade his seeing her again. By what authority was this command, the younger man asked. "I give you to understand that she is under my protection," Dawson said. The editor also threatened to "publish" McDow in the newspapers, possibly referring to an investigation the *News & Courier* was conducting into doctors, perhaps including McDow, signing false death certificates in an insurance fraud. McDow, saying he would hold Dawson personally responsible for such action, called Dawson an "infernal scoundrel," and ordered him to leave. According to McDow's testimony at his trial, Dawson struck McDow in the head with his cane and pushed him back onto a sofa. The editor, weighing an athletic two hundred pounds, was allegedly about to strike again with his cane when McDow drew a pistol and shot Dawson dead. After a widely followed trial, McDow was acquitted by a jury of five whites and seven blacks, one of the first mixed-race juries in the South. Despite evidence that McDow had tried to bury the body and hide evidence, his claim of self-defense in his own home won the day. It was said that the black jurors disliked Dawson because of some of his editorials on race while the white jurors disliked him because of his role in factional politics.⁹²

But the evidence at trial favored the notion that Dawson's motives in the deadly encounter were "in the name of chivalry and civilized behavior."⁹³ Summing up his life, a former mayor of Charleston called Dawson brilliant, "fearless & energetic."⁹⁴ The old style of personal, flamboyant journalism, although employed to advance the New South, had been silenced in the old way—through the muzzle of pistol.

More than one Southern editor is given credit for helping to end the practice of dueling in the late nineteenth century, either by declining a challenge or through editorial writings. But anti-dueling campaigns, which had existed for nearly a century, finally succeeded with editors such as Dawson because the seigniorial culture that supported the practice had broken apart. O. Jennings Wise, the Virginia governor's son, was one of the last pure representatives of that culture. Meanwhile, the rough frontier influence that also shaped the mind of the South supported a different kind of violence—heated, personal, vindictive assaults with whatever weapon was available. Brownlow, the Tennessee parson-editor, provoked and met such violence with his equally personal, violent form of journalism. Modern, objective journalism, epitomized by Ochs's *New York Times*, was in many ways a conscious rejection of that violently opinionated style.

As industrial organization increasingly modernized the South, the code of the duel as well as unmitigated ruffianism lost their popular support. The phenomenon of lynching, of course, was a different matter that continued well into the twentieth century. But the last major example of personal violence against a newspaper editor came in 1903, in a form that had completely lost the ritualized restraints of the code. The aristocratic Cuban-American N.G. Gonzales, who had been Dawson's key political reporter in the *News & Courier's* crusade against violence, was gunned down unarmed in the streets of Columbia, South Carolina, by Lieutenant Governor James H. Tillman. In his recent unsuccessful campaign for governor, Tillman had been relentlessly attacked by Gonzales's newspaper, the *State*, as "a man without character." Tillman was acquitted of the killing on claims of

self-defense.⁹⁵

Gonzales can be seen as one of the first of a series of progressive editors in the New South, few in number but legendary in status, continuing through the civil rights years of the 1960s. The danger that Gonzales faced would also be faced by liberal Southern editors in the 1930s and by their heirs in the 1950s and 60s. *Raleigh News & Observer* editor Jonathan Daniels, one of those Southern liberals, dedicated his 1965 book *They Will Be Heard* (which includes a chapter on Dawson and Gonzales) to three contemporaries whose lives were regularly threatened by segregationists—Barry Bingham, Hodding Carter II, and Ralph McGill, “Gallant captains in the continuing American Crusade.”⁹⁶ Hodding Carter III, when he began working at his father’s liberal newspaper in Greenville, Mississippi, in 1959, kept a pistol handy for the next five years, out of “mostly youthful histrionics, but I didn’t think so at the time.”⁹⁷

What survived of the history of dueling editors was not a code for using a pistol, nor the superstition of truth triumphant in a literal battle against falsehood.⁹⁸ Instead, the sole legacy was a tradition of courage in the face of actual danger. It survived in Ochs’s manifesto for his *New York Times* and its influence on twentieth-century journalism, that good professional journalism must be fearless, “without fear or favor.” Hodding Carter II’s 1969 lecture on the history of the Southern press found little that was praiseworthy “except the virtue of a certain valor and the tenacity of printer’s ink.” The elder Carter, whose Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 1946 recognized his legendary defiance of Mississippi’s violent white supremacy, noted that Southern duelists “did not confine their antagonism to the Abolitionist foe,” but spilled blood for all kinds of political conviction—or seemingly “for the simple joy of it.”⁹⁹ Virginius Dabney, whose pre-*Brown v. Board* liberalism on race earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1948 at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, also found a heritage of courage in “the dueling editors of Old Virginia,” the subject of his 1987 book *Pistols and Pointed Pens*. The so-called “liberal editors of the South” before and during the civil rights years were actually quite slow to oppose segregation or understand the full significance of the movement. But editors that Carter II names—Ralph McGill at the *Atlanta Constitution*, Mark Ethridge at the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Hazel Brannon Smith in Lexington, Mississippi, Harry Ashmore at the *Arkansas Gazette*, and Sylvan Meyer in Gainesville, Georgia—were all heirs of the duelist’s nonchalance about personal safety. Carter III, the son, described this quality as a bantam courage. “For the most part, it was understood to be physical at its core,” he wrote. “Those who demonstrated it were respected, if not necessarily loved.”¹⁰⁰ If there was any heritage from the South’s dueling editors, it was this physical fearlessness as a badge of honor.

NOTES

¹ *Daily Examiner*, Jan. 3, 1866; and “The Chivalry,” *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1866. William D. Coleman returned fire with a single-barrel pistol, while *Enquirer* editor Nathaniel Tyler did not shoot, according to the *Richmond Dispatch*, cited by Virginius Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1987).

² Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 58. In the *Daily Examiner* of Jan. 9, 1866, Pollard wrote: “As the readers of the *Examiner* will have observed, I have studiously refrained from all comment upon or allusion to, the recent rencontre in the Capitol between myself and Mr. Tyler, of the *Enquirer*. I shall break the silence in this instance only so far as to ask a suspension of public opinion until an investigation of my case can be had, which has been deferred until Thursday next, on account of the absence of material witnesses.”

³ “A Personal Matter—Rives Pollard and the Times Correspondent,” *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1866.

⁴ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1982), 45.

⁵ Pollard’s attempt to whip Brooks with cowhide fit with the code’s call for a “gentleman” not to duel with someone of a lower station, but to cane him. See Jack K.

Williams, *Dueling in the Old South* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1980), 27–28.

⁶ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690–1960* (New York: MacMillan, 1962), 366.

⁷ Frederick Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1873, 1968), 271–72.

⁸ John Nerone, *Violence against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Nerone’s quotes from Senator William C. Preston on p. 76 are from *Congressional Globe*, 25th Cong., 2nd session, 5 April 1838, 282–83.

⁹ Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), 163.

¹⁰ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 55.

¹¹ Lambert A. Wilmer, *Our Press Gang; or a Complete Exposition of the Corruptions and Crimes of the American Newspapers* (Philadelphia: J.R. Lloyd, 1859; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970), 294. Carey, wounded in the duel, and Oswald were editors respectively of the *Pennsylvania Herald* and the *Independent Gazetteer*. Wilmer notes that Carey began his career as a writer by penning an essay on dueling.

¹² Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on Its Institution* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 161.

¹³ Jonathan Daniels, *They Will Be Heard: America’s Crusading Newspaper Editors* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), 188.

¹⁴ Joanne B. Freeman, “Duelling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr–Hamilton Duel,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2, (1996): 289–313. Also see “Dueling,” *West’s Encyclopedia of American Law*, Jeffrey Lehman and Shirelle Phelps, eds., vol. 4. 2 ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2005), 41. Vice President Burr’s killing of Federalist Party leader Hamilton inspired anti-dueling sermons and editorials that effectively discredited the practice in northern states. One of the main attacks on dueling in the North came from the well-known minister Lyman Beecher, “The Remedy for Duelling: A Sermon Delivered Before the Presbytery of Long-Island, at the Opening of Their Session at Aquebogue, April 16, 1806,” in *Lyman Beecher and the Reform of Society: Four Sermons, 1804–1828* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 24.

¹⁵ Carl Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press: Editorial Spokesmen of the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 80. Osthaus writes that the *Mercury* refrained from personal attacks on Southern figures because these were ungentelemanly and undignified, and “perhaps chastened” by having its editor killed as a consequence.

¹⁶ Elliott J. Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch”: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (1985): 40.

¹⁷ Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 32–33. So much violence was associated with the Vicksburg *Sentinel* and its editors during this period, it is hard to keep the roll call straight. According to Hudson’s *Journalism in the United States*, pp. 763–64, these are the *Sentinel*’s editor-victims: Dr. James Hagan, editor, killed unarmed in 1843 in the street by a stranger upset by an article; Dr. J.S. Fall, assistant editor, badly wounded in one of several fights; James Ryan, editor, killed by editor of rival newspaper; Walter Hickey, wounded in several fights, killed in Texas; John Lavins, editor, imprisoned because of the violence of his articles; Mr. Jenkins, editor, killed in the street; and Mr. Jones, editor, committed suicide by drowning.

¹⁸ J.H. Whitty, *Evening Journal*, Jan. 19, 1909, cited in Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 40; and Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 352.

¹⁹ Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 40–46; and Mott, *American Journalism*, 366.

²⁰ Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady: Spokesman of the New South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), 97.

²¹ Henry Watterson, *The Compromises of Life* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1906), 246. Watterson, in his journeyman start with the *Nashville Banner*, picked up the vituperative style of the period, declaring the legislators in 1866 a pack of “liars” and “scoundrels” who should be “in hell or the penitentiary.” William G. Brownlow’s paper mocked this unknown youth as “Little henry watterson.” See *Knoxville Whig*, April 25, 1866.

²² “Journalism in Tennessee,” *The Writings of Mark Twain*, vol. 19 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875, 1903), 45–53. While the editor of Twain’s fictional *Morning Glory* and *Johnson County War-Whoop* was turning news copy into dripping vituperation, the hapless reporter-narrator recalls that “somebody shot at him through the open window, and marred the symmetry of my ear.” The violence escalates by the minute, with a hand grenade exploding in the stove, an armed colonel appearing at

the door spewing insults and bullets, and a disgruntled reader wielding cowhide. The reporter is hit in the crossfire each time. "I came South for my health, I will go back on the same errand, and suddenly," the reporter concludes, taking his leave.

²³ Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*, 768.

²⁴ Mott, *American Journalism*, 174-75.

²⁵ For example, see Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, *The Press in America*, 4th and 5th editions, 1978 and 1984; *The Media in America: A History*, 5th ed., William David Sloan, ed. (Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 2002); and Nerone, n. 99, 253.

²⁶ *OED Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2005). Dignity is defined as "honourable or high estate, position, or estimation; honour; degree of estimation, rank," with citations prior to 1700 attached to authority or high office.

²⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville commented that "inequalities of men gave rise to the notion of honor" but "that notion is weakening in proportion as these differences are obliterated, and with them it would disappear." He noted in his chapter "Of Honor in the United States" that his observations on democratic society only applied to states where slavery did not exist. See *Democracy in America*, vol. 2. Henry Reeve trans., Phillips Bradley, ed. (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 243.

²⁸ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws on England*, 123, both cited in Post, below.

²⁹ Robert C. Post, "The Social Foundations of Defamation Law: Reputation and the Constitution," *California Law Review* 74, no. 3 (May 1986): 693-717.

³⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, vii.

³¹ For example, *Richmond Times* editor Joseph Bryan was challenged in 1893 by Jefferson D. Wallace of Richmond, who resented something in Bryan's newspaper. Bryan declined, saying the "absurd and barbaric practice" no longer obtained and pressed charges against his challenger. Wallace replied that dueling was still "the redress which obtains among gentlemen," and he was not prosecuted under the state's longstanding anti-dueling statute. See Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 174.

³² To George Roberts, confidential, editor of *Roberts' Semi-Monthly Magazine*, in *Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, vol. 2, Mary C. Simms Oliphant, et al., eds. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952, 1982), 243. Simms wrote: "Your Journal descants against dueling, but if your [Northern] public opinion would only tolerate this practice, it would soon put a stop to the blackguardism of the press, the insolence of petty knaves, and the slanderous personalities of their writings," April 8, 1841.

³³ Williams cites a Tennessee lawyer who writes in his recollections of the nineteenth-century South, "To carry a personal grievance into a court of law degraded the plaintiff in the estimation of his peers and put the whole case beneath the notice of society." See Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 24-25.

³⁴ James R. Webb, "Pistols for Two . . . Coffee for One," *American Heritage* 26, no. 2 (1975): 66.

³⁵ Rufus Wilmot Griswold, ed., *The Works of John Milton*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1856), 189.

³⁶ A witness to a duel in Georgia in 1828 told the father of one of the principals that his son died "in the attitude of a manly resistance and determined purpose of character," and that the witness would publish this fact in the newspapers. See *Niles Weekly Register*, vol. 35 (Baltimore: 1828-1829), 405.

³⁷ Barbara J. Griffin, ed. "Notes and Documents: Thomas Ritchie and the Code Duello," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92, no. 1 (January 1984): 71-95.

³⁸ Leland Krauth, "Mark Twain Fights Sam Clemens' Duel," *Mississippi Quarterly* 33, no. 2, (1980): 141-53.

³⁹ Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 62-63. The ministers were Nathaniel Bowen and William Barnwell.

⁴⁰ John F. Kvach, *De Bow's Review: The Antebellum Vision of a New South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 24.

⁴¹ Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 71. A study of two-thirds of South Carolina's judicial districts found only a single case of slander before 1812, the year dueling was outlawed in the state, twenty-one cases over the next ten years, and a steady rise after that.

⁴² Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 40. Wilson's 1838 *Code of Honor* is reproduced as an appendix.

⁴³ "Duel!" *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 2004, Smithsonian.com, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/duel-104161025/>.

⁴⁴ Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 15; and John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1899), 89-97.

⁴⁵ Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 19-37; and Osthaus, *Partisans of the*

Southern Press, 118-48.

⁴⁶ Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 15; Wise, *End of an Era*, 90.

⁴⁷ "The Problem of the Free Negro. . .," *Richmond Enquirer*, July 13, 1858.

⁴⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, July 9, 1859.

⁴⁹ "Personal Explanation," *Richmond Enquirer*, July 13, 1858.

⁵⁰ Dabney, *Pistols and Pointed Pens*, 36-37.

⁵¹ Wise, *End of an Era*, 95.

⁵² Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 31-32. The author calls Wise number one among editor-duelists by virtue of fighting eight formal duels. Also see Wise, *End of an Era*, 94-95.

⁵³ John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor, or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling* (Charleston: James Finney, 1838), repr. in Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 91.

⁵⁴ Curtis Carroll Davis, "The Small Bang at Bangs," *Virginia Cavalcade* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 1961): 4-9. John S. Wise, unlike his older brother, was an excellent marksman. But his traditional-style duel with John Stuart Crockett in Yellow Sulfur Springs, Virginia, in 1882, ended without harm after three missed shots and one misfire. Two years later, goaded by a Lynchburg editor in a political squabble, John Wise publicly renounced dueling as uncivilized and illegal. The renunciation was called his "bravest act" and credited with helping end the practice in Virginia. Elsewhere, the younger Wise recalled that his father, who fought one duel and issued challenges for two more, was convinced that dueling was "the only practical method of maintaining in a community of gentlemen the courtesy and deference and mutual consideration which was essential to such society." See John S. Wise, "The Fire-Eaters," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 2, 1906, 6-7.

⁵⁵ Wise, *End of an Era*, 96.

⁵⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 231-33.

⁵⁷ Wise, "The Fire-Eaters," 6-7, 28.

⁵⁸ Wilmer, *Our Press Gang*, n. 1.

⁵⁹ *Mark Twain's Journalism in Tennessee, with Sundry Accounts . . .* (Ames, Iowa.: Press of the Crippled Turtle, 1955), limited edition, in Special Collections, University of Virginia.

⁶⁰ Wilmer, *Our Press Gang*, 311-12.

⁶¹ Hodding Carter, *Their Words Were Bullets: The Southern Press in War, Reconstruction, and Peace* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 15.

⁶² Wilmer, *Our Press Gang*, 387.

⁶³ E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), originally published by Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1937, 3-6; and *Secessionists and Other Scoundrels: Selections from "Parson Brownlow's Book"* (1862), Stephen V. Ash, ed., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 16-18.

⁶⁴ Ash, "Introduction," xi, *ibid*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁶⁶ *Jonesboro Whig*, May 14, 1840, cited in Coulter, *William G. Brownlow*, 39.

⁶⁷ Coulter, *William G. Brownlow*, 35-46.

⁶⁸ Mott, *American Journalism*, 241-43.

⁶⁹ Coulter, *William G. Brownlow*, 50-51; and Mott, *American Journalism*, 269.

⁷⁰ Coulter, *William G. Brownlow*, 384-85, 393, 395.

⁷¹ Sharon Joyce Gates and Catherine C. Mitchell, "Adolph Ochs: Learning What's Fit to Print," *American Journalism* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 229.

⁷² Gerald W. Johnson, *An Honorable Titan: A Biographical Sketch of Adolph S. Ochs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), 22-26.

⁷³ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 110-12.

⁷⁴ Alex S. Jones and Susan E. Tift, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1999), 42-43.

⁷⁵ Gates and Mitchell, "Adolph Ochs: Learning What's Fit to Print," 228-29.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *An Honorable Titan*, 27.

⁷⁷ Gates and Mitchell, "Adolph Ochs: Learning What's Fit to Print," 228.

⁷⁸ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 229.

⁷⁹ Johnson, *An Honorable Titan*, 32-33, 65-66. Johnson writes that George Ochs describes these fracasas "with gusto" in his account of the family history.

⁸⁰ In Ochs's address to the National Editorial Association five years before he bought the *New York Times*, he said people were increasingly demanding that a paper print the news "without fear of consequences, the favoring of special theories or the promotion of personal interests." Cited in Gates and Mitchell, "Adolph Ochs: Learning What's Fit to Print,"

⁸¹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1951). The first five chapters of this classic history tell the story of the New South as it has been generally accepted among historians since then.

⁸² Ibid., 122-23. J.D. Williamson was president of the independent line; Patrick Calhoun was general attorney for the Richmond and West Point Terminal Railway.

⁸³ Dawson to Robert Reid Hemphill, June 28, 1876, Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University Libraries, Durham, N.C., cited in E. Culpepper Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson and the Politics of Restoration: South Carolina, 1874-1889* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 9-14.

⁸⁴ Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 16-23.

⁸⁵ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 157.

⁸⁶ Gonzales to his uncle, Dec. 23, 1883, Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, cited in Clark, 100.

⁸⁷ Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 63-66.

⁸⁸ Osthaus, *Partisans of the Southern Press*, 159. This is not to say that Dawson's views on race were progressive or brotherly by any modern standard. Clark, his biographer, writes that Dawson "was a white supremacist who alternately despised and pitied the Negro," but also believed in a Jeffersonian individualism (for property owners) and a social Darwinism that allowed for the emergence of meritorious black citizens, at least in theory.

⁸⁹ William Watts Ball, qtd. in Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 105.

⁹⁰ Letter of July 13, 1880, qtd. in *The Cash-Shannon Duel* (Boykin, S.C.: Irby, 1930), 19, as cited in Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 106.

⁹¹ Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 107-8.

⁹² Ibid., 215-17. Clark's account is from extensive coverage of the case in the

News & Courier, including transcripts from the trial.

⁹³ Ibid., 224.

⁹⁴ William Porcher Miles Diary, March 13, 1889, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, cited in Clark, *Francis Warrington Dawson*, 220.

⁹⁵ Lewis Pinckney Jones, *Stormy Petrel: N.G. Gonzales and His State* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 293-308. Progressive magazine editor Walter Hines Page, a self-exiled Southerner working in New York, foresaw in the Tillman acquittal the emergence of racist demagogues in the twentieth-century South. "An aristocracy in a democracy means a group of a few privileged persons; outside this group, the bully; behind the bully an ignorant populace that will elect the bully to office, will hold him in honor and will acquit him of crime." See "The Matter with South Carolina," *World's Work* 5, no. 5 (March 1903): 3,153.

⁹⁶ Daniels, *They Will Be Heard*.

⁹⁷ "Speech by Hodding Carter III, Emory University, April 3, 1998," text given to the author by Carter.

⁹⁸ It is interesting to note how far this hopeful Miltonic metaphor sinks into Arendtian pessimism in reaction to twentieth-century political propaganda. In an essay originally published in the *New Yorker* on Feb. 25, 1967, political theorist Hannah Arendt argued that against modern political machinery, truth always loses to lies, but with this one consolation: "Persuasion and violence can destroy truth, but they cannot replace it." See Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, Peter Baehr, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 570.

⁹⁹ Carter, *Their Words Were Bullets*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Hodding Carter III, "The Difficult Isolation Courage Can Bring," *Nieman Reports* (Summer 2006): 90-91.